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ABSTRACT

Duquesne's "Saturday College" program in the Greater Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) area began in the spring of 1992. This is a program designed specifically for the working adult who wants to complete a bachelor's degree in 4 years by attending classes on Saturday. The format of the program and the concerns of the adults in it required reconceiving the objectives and curricular content of traditional semester courses. The challenge is how to guide the students even though they are in class for only a few hours a week. Because the format is accelerated, educational objectives for writing instruction were listed and prioritized and emphasis given to 4 of the 11 objectives: the problem solution essay, the informative summary, comparison and contrast, and analysis with response. These objectives were chosen based on an informal survey of what writing skills faculty in other disciplines asked of their students most often. Eliminated from the list were the research paper and the taking exams essay: these, it was determined, were being covered in another course. To cover the other objectives--cross-curricular emphasis, critical reading strategies, grammar, and writing process orientation--strategies were developed coordinating out-of-class and in-class worktime. In other words, students perform exercises out of class, with the assistance of a booklet written especially for them, so class time is spent in the most productive way possible. (Contains the seven overhead figures used in the presentation.) (TB)

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ED 402 574

A New Wave:

Teaching Writing in Duquesne University's Saturday College

The current trend by organizations in the business and professional community to "rightsize" or "downsize" their work force has caused many working adults to seek ways to secure their position within their organization. Many of these people, who are in their late 20s to 40s and who hold full-time middle management or lesser positions in the work force, find themselves lacking a "credential" to complement their "experience." Indeed, many of them find that the people who are competing for their positions have bachelors degrees or better. True, some of these anxious adults have been pursuing a degree while they have been working, but they have mostly done so through the traditional avenue offered to working adults. That is, they have been taking night courses, usually one per semester, made available by the continuing education programs at nearby colleges or universities.

Although this method has mostly been used by people seeking a masters degree, typically an MBA, it has not been a successful route for those working adults who desire a bachelor's degree. Whereas a traditional masters program of 30 to 60 credits might take two to three years to complete in a daytime program, the same program would take working adults 4 to 8 years to complete at night because they can take only 1 to 2 evening courses per semester. Thus it takes working adults twice as long as what it takes the traditional day student to complete the degree. When we consider that a typical undergraduate program consists of 120 plus credit hours, then it will take between 7 and 10 years for a working adult to earn a B.A. in an evening program.

Even though continuing education departments have been "creative" in the variety of degrees and offerings they make available, they have not been as attentive to providing working adults with the opportunities to complete a professionally relevant degree in a timely way. Unless institutions design innovative approaches, they will continue to fail to meet the needs of working adults, who are typically classified as "non-traditional students" because of their age, their obligations to family, and their commitment to a full-time job.

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In order to address the situation I have outlined, Duquesne University's Division of Continuing Education began the spring of 1992 to advertise its new "Saturday College" in the Greater Pittsburgh area. This "new" offering was **not** a degree completion program but was instead, a program designed specifically for the working adult who wanted to complete a bachelor's degree in four years by attending classes on Saturdays. As inquiries trickled in, actual enrollment began to exceed the initially projected 30 students, until finally 130 students comprised the first in-coming class for September 1992. Now in its fourth year, Duquesne's Saturday College has 360 students in its undergraduate degree program and 50 students in the first year of its Masters degree program. With its enrollments continuing to grow despite increasing competition from other local institutions that have subsequently offered their variations of a Saturday program, Duquesne's Saturday College has broken new ground in its attempts to meet the needs of a particular population, and, in the process, it has presented students, faculty, and administrators with a new set of challenges.

As one who has taught a variety of required and elective English courses in Duquesne's program, I have found that the Saturday College format and the concerns of adult students require re-conceiving the objectives and curricular content of traditional semester courses. My purpose this afternoon is to identify some of the challenges I have confronted in this accelerated program and to discuss a few of the strategies and methods I have developed to meet them.

Before speaking specifically about my experiences as a writing instructor within the accelerated format, I would like to offer a brief overview of the Saturday College program, which was created by Roberta Aronson and Darlene Zellers, the co-directors of Duquesne Department of Continuing Education. For the program to be successful, Aronson and Zellers determined that its curriculum had to meet the needs of the corporate community, as well as the University community. If the degree's curriculum offered professionally relevant courses, then organizations and individuals in the professional community would pursue it. If the program were academically solid and in keeping with Duquesne University's liberal arts orientation and academic reputation within the community, then it would gain the support of the University community.

To satisfy both communities, Aronson and Zellers first designed a curriculum that united the University's 30 credit required curriculum with continuing education's 24 credit core requirements to form the traditional and institutional foundation for their proposed degree. (see figure1) They then added an innovative concentration of professionally relevant courses and a wide-ranging selection of elective credits—which the Saturday College administration is always attempting to define through periodic questionnaires distributed to the students—to produce the necessary credit hours for the undergraduate degree they proposed—a Bachelor's of Science in Professional Studies. With 30 hours of elective credit, a student could transfer into the program credits already attained from other programs and institutions, which is what many of our first and second year enrollees have done, or a student could use these credits to fulfill special areas of interest. With the three concentration areas, working adults had a choice of professionally-relevant course work areas.

The Saturday College curriculum has in itself attracted working adults because it results in a sound academic degree that the professional community accepts as legitimate. For working adults, the advantage of the program lies in the possibility of completing a degree in 4 years. For employers who largely defray all or part of their employees' tuition, the advantage also lies in the program's being short and definable, thus offering reasonable swift employee development.

Through Duquesne's Saturday College model a working adult can enter the program and complete a 120 credit undergraduate degree in Professional Studies in 4 years by

- completing five 8-week terms each of the fours years, with term I beginning in early September and term V ending at the end of July;
- having a maximum course load of 2 courses per term; and
- attending class every Saturday, excepting those involving Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years, Easter and Memorial Day weekends.

Thus in one year a working adult student can potentially complete 10 courses and in 4 years at this pace attain the required 120 credit hours for the Bachelor's Degree in Professional Studies at Duquesne University. The accelerated model gives working adults a sense of immediate achievement. For them, the program is "do-able." And it is this sense of "do-ability" that has kept our attrition rate exceedingly low and student motivation high. Moreover, because the degree is not as specific to a

major as is a traditional business degree, the program is better able to meet the needs of a diverse population of working adults. To further this sense of "do-ability" are the strategies we have devised to give working adults the means to complete the term's course work demanded by such a short time frame.

With classes meeting for 3 hours and 30 minutes, students have 75% of traditional semester classroom contact hours. The lost 25% is to be made up through various kinds of work outside of class. (see figure 2) In order to not lose precious instructional time, students receive, one week prior to the start of each term's courses, their textbooks and a fully articulated course schedule identifying objectives, requirements, expectations, assignments and exams for the entire 8 weeks of class meetings. Students therefore complete homework and reading assignments prior to every class meeting, including the first of the term. At class #8, as they complete the work for one term, students pick up their syllabi, textbooks, and materials needed to prepare for the first class meeting of the next term.

No "breaks" exist between the completion of one term and the beginning of another term; students forsake time off between terms for a six-week break in the summer. Despite the nonstop sequence of terms, enrollment continues to hold steady, which speaks to the need that this program fulfills for working adults in the community.

However, the program is not without its challenges for both the instructor and the student. One challenge I face concerns simulating the curricular content and objectives of traditional composition course aimed at young adults to the Saturday College format with its adult population without jeopardizing performance-based objectives, the trust of the university as a whole, and accreditation. Perhaps the most difficult challenge is the one I face as a writing instructor, which is to insure that my adult students learn the writing strategies necessary not only academic success in the accelerated and writing intensive program but also for professional success in the work place. (see figure 3)

The accelerated model, however, poses far greater challenges to students than to me. Many Saturday College students say that the accelerated program gives them "too much, too fast," that "they have no life other than Saturday College," and that "they need more assistance to do their homework." Even though our adult students are highly motivated and committed to the program because they see its

value to them in their personal and professional lives, they are also individuals with many other obligations, who do not want their time wasted, who want to do well, and who are overly grade conscious, and who expect from the teacher the same commitment in effort and time they are giving. In fact, on a recent survey asking all Duquesne students for the hours they spend per class during a week, Saturday College students doubled that of the undergraduates at large. Whereas traditional day students spent 3 hours for each course, Saturday College students spent 6 ½ hours per course per week.

Although motivation is not an issue for working adult students, they, like their undergraduate counterparts, vary widely in learning and communication skills. Yet, because of their employment and domestic responsibilities, they have severely limited time to meet with teachers outside of class. Moreover, fewer class meetings and reduced class contact time also limits student and teacher interaction. And considering the amount of material they must cover from week to week, these adult students need more out-of-class "guidance" than does the traditional student who has frequent class meetings and covers less material during a week. Consequently, the Saturday College instructor must effectively use both in-class time and the limited out-of-class time available to students. It becomes crucial to find strategies to meet adults' needs for more "guidance" and for structuring their learning in a manageable way. Thus the Saturday College program aims at quality not quantity, both in its curricular objectives and in out-of-class assistance.

Theoretically, the Saturday College student should cover a semester's worth of material in 8 weeks. But since "it won't all fit," instructors must determine what curricular content is necessary to make a Saturday College course comparable to its counterpart in the normal semester offering. (see figure 4)

This transference process has entailed a "re-examination" of what we do in our semester courses. Accordingly, a first step has been to determine what the necessary learning objectives of the course are that students, any student, **should** learn from the course, no matter the venue in which it is taught. After these learning objectives have been defined and selected, then we had to select the best methods and strategies for achieving these learning objectives within the accelerated format.

For example, the "learning objectives" the Duquesne English department has established for its freshman composition course, Thinking and Writing Across the Curriculum, are the following:

1. To introduce students to writing as process, with emphasis on invention, planning, and drafting strategies.
2. To review the essay form, introduction, body, and conclusion, with emphasis on developing appropriate thesis statements.
3. To have students write 6 essays of 3-4 pages, with revisions.
4. To introduce students to MLA internal documentation.
5. To require students to correctly use outside sources in essays.
6. To introduce students to various rhetorical modes.
7. To introduce students to cross-curricular readings and thought patterns.
8. To introduce students to critical reading strategies, particularly annotation.
9. To introduce students to essay exam taking strategies.
10. To have students write a 6 to 8 page research paper, using outside sources and correct documentation.
11. To improve students' use of standard written English.

In order to adapt these course objectives to the Saturday College format, I first had to prioritize them. Then I had to devise ways to meet these objectives within the accelerated format and then to tailor these methods to the needs of adult students. (see figure 5) Consequently, in the Saturday College composition course, my adult students write 3 out-of-class essays that focus on the most likely modes they will encounter: problem-solution, informative summary (exposition), comparison and contrast, and analysis with response. I was able to determine these modes through a questionnaire I sent to other Saturday College faculty that asked them to identify how often and what kinds of writing assignments they required in their courses. Except for the problem-solution essay, the papers are reading based so that students must learn to engage with other "voices" and to correctly use and cite outside sources. In this way, I also introduce my students to MLA documentation as well as to the issue of plagiarism.

I was able to omit two semester objectives from my Saturday College course: the research paper and strategies for taking essay exams. Yet both of these objectives have been incorporated into a required first term course called Adult Transition Seminar, which resembles an introduction to college studies. While the students do not write a research paper for this course, they do, after learning how

to access information in the library, prepare the preliminary steps for such an essay: that is, they select and define a topic, locate appropriate sources, formulate a working thesis, develop a preliminary outline, and complete a brief (5 sources) annotated bibliography.

In order adapt the remaining course objectives—the cross-curricular emphasis and critical reading strategies, grammar, and writing process orientation— to the Saturday College accelerated format, I have had to consider where they can be best learned: in class, out of class, or in a combination of both. In general, what we do in class together becomes the model for what students do outside of class, and what is done out of class is then used in class as the basis for a larger task. By integrating and relating sequential assignments, I help students gain necessary repetition and practice of skills that are more easily accomplished in the multiple class meetings of the traditional semester system. More importantly, this interrelationship of assignments provides Saturday College students with necessary, if only verbal, feedback on their understanding and application of course concepts.

For example, consider what the Saturday College student does for their second essay, an informative summary, for which I usually use Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail." For homework, students read King's text. Then they complete a short exercise on critical reading, such as preparing a concept map of the text's key points, or drafting a short summary paragraph of a key idea, or identifying by keywords the text's main idea and its support. After completing this comprehension task, students then formulate a working thesis and prepare a preliminary plan for the main points of their essay that they bring to class. They do not draft the essay. By purposefully separating the planning stage from the drafting stage of the essay, I cause students to consider what they are going to say and to emphasize how writing tasks can be broken into more manageable chunks.

With the preliminary planning done out of class, during class I focus the students on strategies and concerns related to drafting and content development by drawing on what they prepared for class. For instance, I ask students to share with the class what they have done independently on their "critical reading" exercise. Students then organize in small groups or pairs and collaboratively draft a paragraph of the kind that might be used in the body of their essay. This way students learn and

practice how to select effective quotations and integrate them into their own writing. While they write, I visit groups in order to provide immediate instruction and/or feedback on paragraph formation, grammar, and other concerns. These small collaborative exercises help build the confidence of adult students, a confidence often more fragile than that of traditional students. Through these "drafting" exercises and by sharing their "plan" and thesis with the class, students receive immediate verbal feedback prior to their drafting the essay. At home, students draft, revise, and edit the essay for submission at the next week's class.

To provide the extra guidance that students need for the out of class work, especially the revising and editing of their essays, I have developed a "study guide" for the course, which they purchase with their textbooks prior to class #1. Purposefully presented in an informal and conversational tone addressed to adult students, this study guide offers further explanations of material that they may not fully absorb during class or that they may need at 10 p.m. Wednesday evening when they sit down to do their homework. Not only does the study guide cover all course assignments, both the critical reading and writing exercises, but also (and this is very important) it includes examples and discussions of concepts covered in class that have proved troublesome to previous Saturday College students. It also prefaces assignments with statements of intent that further explain or draw connections to other course concepts and tasks, and it usually gives students a sample of what they are expected to do.

For instance, prior to planning their own out of class essay assignment, students read three sample essays written by past Saturday College students. These samples are followed by a series of questions that ask students to consider the sample essays in terms of each one's strengths and weakness in regard to form and content development appropriate to the assignment. After students consider these questions, I offer a brief analysis of the sample essays' strengths and weaknesses, including suggestions for improvement and revision.

The purpose of selecting three samples is to provide students with the differences that exist between essays receiving grades of A, B, and C. These samples reveal the difference in content, structure, and expression that earned each essay its grade, and they are followed with a discussion of

how the writer could improve the essay. These samples, according to my students, have given them the confidence to develop their own ideas because they encounter in the samples concerns similar to their own (i.e., the troubles of the working adult in the first essay assignment, the problem-solution essay) and they know that the writers were individuals similar to themselves. As one student commented on the Study Guide's evaluation form: "If this person can do it, so can I." Mostly, these samples provide adult students with a "sense of what is expected from them," which is a very important need of theirs given the limited time they have to devote to their studies and since the shortness of the term prevents redoing "mistakes." In fact, the shortness of the term has curtailed the optional "revisions" of papers by students—there just isn't enough time to revise and to complete new material.

More importantly, these samples and the Study Guide material have proven very helpful to students when they have to revise their own papers. The adult students have said that "revising" their own work is the most difficult task of the writing process. Since revision is done outside of class (class time limitations have caused the omission of peer editing sessions during class), I have developed in the Study Guide revision worksheets directly oriented toward issues of structure, content development, and expression and correctness specific to the concerns of each essay assignment. With specific references to the student samples, these questions and suggestions help students understand what they are to do when applying these revision suggestions to their own work. Students who struggle with their writing, as well as those who are good writers, have repeatedly commented that these samples and the study guide idea generally have been very helpful. And I must admit that I have received few essays with structural problems and even fewer "desperate" phone calls this year than in the past.

In the Saturday College format, once students complete an essay, I must evaluate and have them ready to return at our next meeting, so that students gain important feedback before beginning their next essay. However, while I am evaluating this assignment, students will be reading about the next essay assignment, reading a new set of student samples, and formulating a tentative plan for their next essay for this next meeting. This then is the process for the composition class in the accelerated format. In our 8 weeks, students will write 3 out of class essays and one in-class essay, which occurs

on class 8 during the final exam session. For both students and teacher, the course moves rapidly with much material to be covered, understood, and completed by all.

By having integrated reading tasks (the critical reading assignments) and writing tasks that transcend out-of-class and in-class activities in the freshman composition course, adult students receive a series of sequential, interrelated learning tasks that provide the necessary reinforcement, practice, and frequent assessment needed for learning curricular objectives in a far shorter time than is traditionally done. And with the use of the Study Guide, particularly its use of student models, further discussion, and encouraging tone, working adult students acquire the necessary assistance to complete their learning objectives within the accelerated format.

In order to further help faculty and students perform well in the Saturday College's accelerated form, the Saturday College administration has taken several steps to further support both. One, which is especially important to writing instructors: writing courses are limited to 15 students. Two, a teaching assistant is provided for each course, usually a graduate student who is required to attend all classes and functions as a tutor for students who seek additional help and as an assistant to the teacher, primarily as another voice during class workshops. (see figure 6)

I'm afraid my twenty minutes cannot do justice to the differences experienced between teaching a composition course to traditional students on a semester basis and teaching it to working adult students in an accelerated format. For those of us committed to this program and its goals, the reward of teaching adult students far outweigh the difficulties. (see figure 7) But the program will need to remain "innovative" if it is to retain its current population base and continue to draw others to the program. It must be willing to make "changes." For instance, a pressing obstacle currently facing Saturday College composition teachers and the program is the noticeable difference in writing proficiency between this year's students and earlier enrollees. With little or no previous college experience, this year's enrollees are in need of more basic writing instruction. No less motivated and determined than previous students, these students are, however, more easily frustrated by the amount and kind of writing demanded by the program because their deficiencies are more basic and thus a more noticeable hindrance to the expression of their ideas. Hence, I have proposed that the

administration consider offering these students the option of taking a 3 credit 16 week Saturday College composition course, a tactic that was implemented last year for the college algebra course. And that a writing sample be required to help writing instructors place students with the proper instruction needed to complete course work. If such alterations are not made, then these students will no longer find the program "do-able." More than encouraging guidance is needed. Finally, Saturday College administration needs to encourage more faculty to develop "companion study guides," and to help in this task, faculty development seminars are needed for the first-time and "veteran" instructor on adult learning styles, the Saturday College student profile, and other faculty defined issues. Despite this new challenges, Duquesne's Saturday College program surely offers one viable "wave of the future" for institutions of higher learning and for working adult students!

Note: the following were overheads used with this presentation.

Figure 1: the Saturday College program

To attain the Bachelor's of Science in Professional Studies, the Saturday College student completes

- the University's 30 credit core requirements, which includes theology and other traditional courses such as composition, college algebra, biology, modern history, and others, and
- the 24 credits of Continuing Education's professional curriculum to "prepare students to meet the challenge of a wide range of careers" that includes courses like computer applications, accounting, micro and macro economics, structure of the legal environment, and understanding the marketplace,

and

- chooses one of three 36 credit concentration areas—organizational leadership, professional communication, and organizational behavior—and
- completes 30 credits of electives, which are courses drawn from the departments of the University given student interest indicated on periodic surveys or are courses developed cooperatively by University departments and Saturday College faculty to meet the needs of the Saturday College population.

Figure 2: **Saturday College Student's schedule for each term**

1 week prior to class #1, student picks up course syllabus and textbooks and completes readings and homework due for class #1

Week 6, student registers for next term's courses

Week 8, student completes course for term (exams, presentations, projects due, etc.)

Week 8, student picks up course syllabus and textbooks and completes readings and homework due for class #1 of next term.

Forsakes breaks in-between terms, to have 6 continuous weeks in the summer off—from August to second week in September

Figure 3: **Responsibility as an instructor in the Saturday College format**

1. to transfer objectives and curricular content of the semester composition course to the Saturday College format **without**

   - **jeopardizing the integrity or quality** of the course for purposes of accreditation
   - **furthering skepticism** in the broader university community of the program's ability to achieve its aims without sacrificing learning objectives and curricular content

2. to provide these adult writers with the writing strategies needed for

   - their **academic success** in the Saturday College's accelerated and increasingly writing intensive program
   - their **professional success** as writers in the work world

Figure #4: Transference has entailed **"rethinking"** and

"re-examination" of

what we do in our semester courses

and

why we do the things we do!

The Process for Course Transference

1. Determine what the necessary or essential elements of the course are.
2. Define learning objectives that students, any student, **should** learn from the course.
3. Determine what tasks and processes used in the semester system can easily transfer to the accelerated format.
4. Devise new methods and strategies for achieving these same learning objectives within the accelerated format.
5. Add other learning objectives and their methods of accomplishment to round out course.

Figure 5: **Saturday College Course Objectives**

1. Introduce students to writing as process, with emphasis on invention, planning, and drafting strategies, achieved through in-class and out of class integrated learning tasks.
2. Have students write 3 out of class essays of 3-4 pages, with revisions for first two, remaining two optional.
3. Introduce students to MLA internal documentation and require students to correctly use outside sources in three of the four assigned essays.
4. Introduce students to various rhetorical modes, especially exposition, comparison and contrast, problem-solution, and analysis.
5. Introduce students to cross-curricular readings and thought patterns through independently completed critical reading exercises from companion study guide for class discussions and homework.
6. Improve student written expression through collaborative writing tasks, grammar exercises, and instructor and peer feedback.

Figure 6: **Teaching Assistant**

Administration's Support for TA
- graduate student chosen by instructor
- provided stipend of $750 for term

Duties:
- Required to attend all classes
- Hold a weekly but optional study session for the course,
- Be available for tutorials on appointment basis,
- Coordinate all make-up exams,
- Be another contact person familiar with course content and instructor expectations,
- Be a go between for student to "imposing" professor
- Do some grading or commenting on student homework (though the administration suggests the Saturday College faculty retain evaluation as their responsibility).

Teaching Assistant duties for my composition class
- Another "voice" to guide student groups during in-class tasks,
- Be available for grammar tutorials and for individual drafting concerns,
- Evaluate for immediate return any grammar homework or in-class quizzes or writings,
- Hold weekly "office" hours to foster student contact.

Figure 7: Problems and Rewards of the Program for Instructors

Problems:
- the time needed to establish the foundation or complete preliminary steps is not available in the 8 week format, eliminates some projects and tasks.
- reduction of traditional contact hours
- the necessity of appropriately and effectively using the three hour and thirty minute class period
- must integrate and repeat multiple learning objectives and tasks into fewer assignments
- provide timely feedback and increase frequency of assessment
- the necessity of providing the Saturday college student with structure and guidance for out-of-class work and preparation.
- the need to develop a fully-articulated course schedule that identifies the readings, assignments, and exam dates for the course.

Benefits:
- Our traditional courses have improved, have become better given our experiences in Saturday College.
- Rewards from teaching highly motivated, mature adult students.